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The Chief Historical Error in Barbour's *Bruce*.

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THE CHIEF HISTORICAL ERROR IN BARBOUR'S *BRUCE*

When a poet has been convicted of sin against fact, we poor pedantic critics incline, merely on that account, to question his literary power. The chance, or the need, to display some superiority in knowledge to a writer whose work we undertake to discuss, is apt to inflate us with such an undue sense of our own importance that we unfairly minimize his merit.

The Bruce is a case in point. Hardly a single literary judgment has been passed on that well-known poem in which the author's departures from fact have not been dwelt upon out of all proportion to their artistic significance, and one supposed error in particular has been emphasized so much that it has become a serious detriment to Barbour's reputation, even as a poet. It stands at the very threshold of his work, and few have had occasion to mention the book at all without apparently feeling it a point of honour, if not of privilege, to call attention to it, with surprise or contempt, according to the individual's

temperament. The object of the present paper is to try to remove this stumbling-block to a generous appreciation of *The Bruce* by all.

I

"What is the precise historical value of Barbour's poem," wrote Professor Skeat, in his preface to the standard editions of the work,[1] "I leave it for historians to determine. . . . The most extraordinary of the author's errors is certainly that in which he confuses Robert Bruce the grandfather with Robert Bruce the grandson. . . . This is enough to render us cautious as to believing any of his statements without additional evidence; and it is clear that, with the usual license of a professed writer of Romance, he has embellished his stories whenever he thought he could do so effectively."

Professor Skeat's opinion naturally carried great weight, and has been frequently reiterated by other scholars.[2] Some have gone still farther than he in condemnation of the poet's "license." Thus Sir Herbert Maxwell, who deemed it of the utmost importance to ascertain what de-

[1] For the Early English Text Society, 1888, p. lvii; for the Scottish Text Society, 1898, p. lxii.

[2] James Moir, in his edition of *The Wallace* for the Scottish Text Society, 1889, Introd., p. xxxii; W. A. Craigie, *The Scottish Review*, July, 1893, p. 177; Henry Morley, *English Writers*, 1896, IV, p. 39; George Saintsbury, *Short History of English Literature*, p. 172; Aeneas Mackay, *Dict. Nat. Biog.*, under Barbour; A. H. Millar, *A Literary History of Scotland*, New York, 1903, p. 15; etc.

"Robert Bruce," wrote Professor Freeman, "has become so thoroughly mythical a being that it may be necessary to explain to many people who he was. One Scottish romance goes so far as to make him defeat Edward the First at Bannockburn! Another, of older date, identifies him with his own grandfather, makes him the competitor for the crown, but makes him also proudly refuse to do homage for it" (*Historical Essays*, 1st Series, 1896, p. 76—"The Relations between the Crowns of England and Scotland").

gree of reliance may be placed on Barbour's veracity, puts the case strongly: [3]

Unhappily, Barbour's poem, which is of the deepest interest to the philologer as the very earliest extant specimen of Scottish vernacular literature, has been almost irretrievably discredited as a chronicle by a monstrous liberty which the author takes in rolling three real personages into one ideal hero. In this way he has treated father, son and grandson, all of whom bore the name of Robert de Brus, and gravely presented them as one and the same individual. Barbour was at work on his poem, as he himself informs us, in 1375, forty-six years after the death of Robert I, and it is impossible to doubt that he deliberately and consciously perpetrated the fabrication whereby he made Robert de Brus, the 'competitor,' the same as his grandson, Robert de Brus, Earl of Carrick, crowned King of Scots in 1306, and threw into the same personality the intermediate Robert de Brus, Lord of Annandale, who was King Edward's govenor of Carlisle during John Balliol's brief war. Such a glaring figment placed in the forefront of an historical work, might render and, in the eyes of some people, has rendered, all that follows it of no historical importance. This great national epic has been denounced as of no more value to history than the romances of Walter Scott or Alexander Dumas. . . . But closer examination reveals that the cardinal falsehood is all disposed of in the first few cantos. . . . The verdict, therefore, on the value of Barbour's poem, as a contribution to history, must be that it is worthless as a record of events which led to the War of Independence, but of great merit as a narrative of the events of that war and of the conduct and acts of those who took part in it, and that it vividly reflects the social state of Scotland in the fourteenth century.

The supposed confusion has not gone without attempts at explanation, especially on the part of Scots. As early as 1856, Cosmo Innes advanced the idea [4] that it was not by heedlessness, but with deliberate intent, that Barbour joined the different figures. "His ideal Bruce," the critic thought, "was a personage mixed up of the grandfather and grandson"; the poet pictured "the ideal life of his

[3] *Robert the Bruce* (Heroes of the Nations Series), 1897, pp. 5 ff.

[4] In his edition of *The Bruce* for the Spalding Club, Preface, pp. ix-x.

family." "It suited Barbour's purpose to place Bruce altogether right, Edward outrageously wrong, in the first discussion of the disputed succession. It suited his views of poetical justice that Bruce, who had been so unjustly dealt with, should be the Bruce who took vengeance for that injustice at Bannockburn; though the former was the grandfather, the other the grandson. His hero is not to be degraded by announcing that he had once sworn fealty to Edward and once done homage to Baliol, or ever joined any party but that of his country and freedom."

"When we remember," wrote Dr. Ross later [5] in a similar strain, "that the author was a scholar and a dignitary of the Church, that he took a prominent part in public affairs, and was likely to be familiar with the most authentic traditions of the previous generation, we need experience little difficulty in accepting as substantially true a narrative that is intrinsically credible and, except in one point, in no way at variance with earlier authorities. The work is unquestionably a poem as well as a chronicle. When Barbour makes the Bruce who competed with Baliol for the crown, the victor of Bannockburn, it would be absurd to suppose him ignorant of the fact that the latter was the grandson of the former. He deliberately deviates from historical fact to enhance the glory of that national freedom whose praise he had so finely sung. He takes, in short, a poetic license in a somewhat hurried introduction, and avowedly begins his work with the covenant between Bruce and Comyn."

But recently two Scottish critics have tried to solve the difficulty in another way. Mr. T. F. Henderson patrioti-

[5] John M. Ross, *Scottish History and Literature*, Glasgow, 1884, pp. 53-54.

cally repudiates " Sir Herbert Maxwell's insinuation that Barbour, contrary to his strong professions of regard for 'suthfastness,' may have suppressed or modified the truth from mere sordid motives," but still is disinclined to accept Cosmo Innes's ingenious vindication of his intelligence, if not of his veracity. He says: [6]

No doubt this is a most plausible explanation, but is it the only possible one? And unless it be the only possible one, ought Barbour to be lightly credited with so glaring and deliberate, and at the same time with so foolish and vain, a falsehood? Is there not at least the faint chance that Barbour may have made an accidental slip, or that the error was the work of some copyist? This last alternative obtains some corroboration from the fact that in the portion of *The Bruce* preserved by Wyntoun, instead of the lines—

> This lord the Brwss, I spak of ayr,
> Saw all the kynryk swa forfayre,

we have

> Quhen all this sawe the Brwss Robert
> That bare the crowne soone efftirwart.

And even if Wyntoun has merely altered his copy of Barbour, the fact that Wyntoun has at least not accepted the accidental or intended fiction, indicates that there was no general desire among the Scots to bolster up either their cause or that of Bruce by such a stupid artifice. Further, Barbour has no need to have recourse to it, for his theme did not include the years in Bruce's life when, perhaps, his patriotism was stifled by his rivalry with Baliol; and to have introduced him simply as the grandson of him he " spak of ayr " would equally well have suited his purpose. Lastly,—and this seems conclusive,—if Barbour did wilfully falsify facts, how could he have set himself to expose his own falsification by compiling the genealogy of the Stewarts, ending with Robert II of Scotland?

These remarks of Mr. Henderson's were decidedly to the point, and immediately bore some fruit, though not probably just what he expected.

In his revolutionary book, *The Wallace and the Bruce*

[6] *Scottish Vernacular History*, London, 1898; 3rd rev. edition, Edinburgh, 1910, pp. 44 f.

Restudied,[1] Mr. J. T. T. Brown, properly impressed by the argument from Wyntoun's corroborative lines, took up the suggestion of a possible corruption in Barbour's text and used it for his own purposes.

" Both in *The Bruce* and in the long parallel passage of the *Cronykil,*" he wrote, " there is a mistake in designating the grandfather as Earl of Carrick, that title having been first borne by the son; but notwithstanding that slip, Wyntoun carefully distinguishes, as Professor Skeat remarks, ' between the three generations.' But, by the single line in *The Bruce*

Thys lord the Brwyss, I spak of ayr

the whole confusion is occasioned. . . . It is most noticeable, however, that the line in question is one of the variants between the poem and the *Cronykil,* and by preferring Wyntoun's text to the manuscripts the ' glaring figment ' at once disappears."

Mr. Brown, assuming thus that the error must be due to the condition of the manuscripts, uses the assumption to fortify his sweeping contention that we have Barbour's text only in a greatly revised version made by the scribe John Ramsay, almost a century after Barbour wrote the original poem. " The mere suspicion " he maintains, " of contamination of the manuscripts in an all-important line should at any rate lead us to examine with greater vigilance all other lines that awaken doubts concerning their authenticity."

One would have thought that the arguments of Mr. Henderson and Mr. Brown were sufficiently cogent to prevent offhand reassertions of the old views they combated. But that has not proved to be the case. Dr. Peter Giles,

[1] *Bonner Beiträge zur Anglistik,* Bonn, 1900, pp. 92 ff.

writing about *The Bruce* in the recent *Cambridge History of English Literature,*[8] declares:

> It is in no real sense a history, for Barbour begins with the astounding confusion of Robert the Bruce with his grandfather, the rival of John Balliol in claiming the crown. As Barbour's own life overlapped that of King Robert, it is impossible to believe that this is an accidental oversight. The story is a romance, and the author treated it as such; though, strange to say, it has been regarded from his own time to this as, in all details, a trustworthy source for the history of the period.

Evidently, no real decision has as yet been come to in regard to the problem. It still vexes the critics.[9] We end our survey of opinion much as we began!

Personally, I quite agree with Mr. Henderson and Mr. Brown in their conviction that Barbour was neither so stupid nor so mendacious as to identify Bruce the grandfather with Bruce the grandson; but I believe they have

[8] London, 1908, II, p. 104.

[9] Mr. Eyre-Todd does not seem to know what to think. In his *Early Scottish Poetry* (Glasgow, 1891, p. 67), eager to defend Barbour, he caught willingly at Cosmo Innes's straw of poetic justice. "In one conspicuous instance only," he says, "did Barbour depart from actual fact. With true instinct he perceived the one possible exception which might be taken to his hero's history,—the fact that he, bred at Edward's court, had renounced his allegiance; and in order to display briefly the underlying right of Bruce's action, he took the liberty of attributing to the grandson the wrong which had been done to the grandfather by the English king. It made a point of poetic justice that the noble who had suffered the wrong should be he who finally took redress at the hands of fortune."

In the preface of his prose rendering of *The Bruce* (1907, p. ix) he appears to accept Mr. Brown's suggestion, remarking that "the whole mistake has arisen from a very slight corruption of the MSS. . . . . The same passage quoted in *Wyntoun's Cronykil*, from an older and fuller MS. of *The Bruce*, altogether avoids the mistake." But in his text (p. 12) he translates the disputed line: "This lord, the Bruce, of whom I spoke before," and comments in a note: "Barbour here, for epic purposes, uses a poetic license." Cf. W. MacNeile Dixon, *English Epic and Heroic Poetry*, 1912, p. 141.

not hit upon the root of the difficulty, the real meaning of the line supposed to contain the poet's "glaring error," his "cardinal falsehood." On closer examination of this line, it looks as if the whole hubbub raised on its account affords an unusually clear example of "much ado about nothing."

II

After a summary statement of the events that led up to Bruce's entrance upon his struggle for the throne, Barbour begins:

> Thys lord the Brwyss I spak of ayr
> Saw all the kynryk (kingdom) swa forfayr (go to ruin);
> And swa trowblyt the folk saw he,
> That he tharoff had gret pitte. (I, 477 ff.)

Now, the first line of this passage, which has caused all the trouble, has invariably been translated: "This lord the Bruce of whom I spake ere (before)." Such a translation is perfectly natural and reasonable. There are plenty of close parallels [10] in the poem to more than justify the interpretation of the last half of the line, where the difficulty lies, and two are identical:

> Quhar that the folk I spak of ere
> Preuely enbuschit were. (IV, 402)

> The Erische kyngis I spak of ar. (XIV, 123)

If the line, thus interpreted, stated a credible fact, no objection would be raised; but when the line, thus interpreted, occasions absurdity, we are justified in seeking to

[10] Cf. "Of stalwart folk that lywyt ar" (I, 19); "Off this twa that I tauld off ar" (I, 76); "As ȝe herd me deuiss it are" (IV, 569): "as I tald ȝow are" (V, 123); "of the bargane I tald of er" (IX, 542); "As I tald air" (XVI, 1); "as I said ere befor" (X, 432); "as said wes ar" (XII, 168); "as I said ar" (XII, 5, 335; XIII, 254, 501; XVIII, 211); "as to ȝow ere said I" (XIII, 449); etc.

interpret the words in another way, as it is quite possible to do.

It should be emphasized first that there is absolutely nothing, unless it be this line, which indicates on the poet's part any confusion, let alone any desire to deceive, in the matter of his hero's identity. Barbour was probably born some years before King Robert Bruce died, and must have known plenty of persons who had associated with him. The poet gathered information, he himself tells us, from followers of the valiant monarch, such as Sir Alan Cathcart, whom he mentions by name.[11] Barbour, moreover, was the "beloved clerk" of the then King of the Scots, and compiled the *Stewart's Original,* a genealogy of the rulers of Scotland down to his own time. He simply could not have identified grandfather and grandson Robert Bruce ignorantly or accidentally; and it is beyond belief that he would have made such a preposterous combination as is implied without some effort to draw advantage from it for his narrative.

Yet in his whole poem, after the prelude, the wars of the elder Bruce are not discussed, nor is he even mentioned again; in the prelude Barbour treated of one, the elder Bruce, only; afterwards of one, the younger Bruce; he never mixes in the slightest way the personalities, careers, or deeds of the two. It is hardly conceivable that even a writer of pure fiction (and Barbour, we remember, insisted on the truth of his narrative) would identify a grandfather and a grandson merely to bring obloquy upon himself. Everybody in Scotland in 1378 knew the difference between the two Bruces, and King Robert then would merely have laughed at Barbour, not given him a pension, for writing a "suthfast" book in which such a ridiculous

[11] *The Bruce,* IX, 575.

combination was made at the outset. It is certainly significant that such a mistake occurs nowhere else in any Scottish document and, so far as we can tell, no single reader of *The Bruce* in early times misunderstood Barbour's lines. Particularly should be noted the fact, as has already been pointed out, that the sober chronicler Wyntoun, with his eyes riveted on the lines, found no error there.

Wyntoun had such admiration for Barbour's poem that when (in 1420) he wrote his own account of the period, he openly borrowed large sections from it, and, as luck decreed, precisely the part of *The Bruce* here under discussion. Wyntoun knew well what the real situation with regard to Bruce's family was and set it forth most clearly in his own work, as follows:

> The Erle Dawy off Huntyngtown
> A lord commendyt of renown
> Ane other dochter had, I herd tell,
> That cald be name wes Ysabelle.
> Robert the Brus in till hys lyff
> Tuk that lady till hys wyff
> That Robert the Brus efftyr that
> On hym a sone cald Robert gat
> The Brus; and he efftyrwart
> Gat a sone, wes cald Robert
> The Brus, the quhilk in till his dayis
> Weddyt off Carryk the Countays.
> Swa wes he Erle and Lord all hale
> Off Carryk and off Annandyrdale;
> The Erle of Carryk, Schir Robert
> Gat on that lady efftyrwart
> Robert the Brus, that was our kyng
> That Scotland tuk in governyng. (VIII, 7)

It is obvious that Wyntoun could not have believed that Barbour had resorted to the device which modern critics have attributed to him, or he would have entered a protest. Wyntoun, however, does not give the slightest hint that

there was anything wrong with the text he was here, in the main, faithfully transcribing, and if he had not thought well to introduce into that text just as this place some lines on another subject, so that, as a result, he was obliged to make a new connection, he would probably have written the lines exactly as they now stand in *The Bruce*.[12] What he does write is perfectly straightforward and simple.

> Quhen all this sawe the Brwyss Robert,
> That bare the crowne swne efftyrwart,
> Gret pytte off the folk he had,
> Set (although) few wordis tharoff he mad.

Mr. Brown has hinted that we might correct Barbour's text (which is not preserved in any manuscript as old as some of Wyntoun) by introducing the latter's lines at this point. But Wyntoun's lines bear clearly his own trade-mark. At the end of his extracts from *The Bruce,* he introduces the following personal passage strongly reminis-

[12] Wyntoun, after skipping 58 lines of *The Bruce* (including the oft-quoted apostrophe to freedom), quotes the following six without change, but then introduces six of his own (hardly in Barbour's style) about the "tyrant" Edward, before he begins again with the words quoted above.

A comparison of Wyntoun's text with Barbour's in the parallel passages shows that Wyntoun departs frequently in minor details from *The Bruce*, which he was merely using for his own convenience, but never with any noteworthy change in the sense. Occasionally he tries to make things a little clearer, as when in the following passage he introduces the name Edward, which Barbour had not mentioned for 65 lines, thus necessitating other changes:

> Messingeris till hym thar sent
> That was than in the haly land
> On Saracenys warrayand.
> (*Bruce*, I, 138 ff.)

> And messengerys send till this Edwart
> That had his wayage tane onwart
> For till pass in the haly land
> On Sarracenys to be thare warrayand.
> (*Cronykil*, VIII, 223 ff.)

cent, at the beginning, of his paraphrase of Barbour's words under discussion:

> Quhat that efftyr this Brws Robert
> In all hys tyme dyde efftyrwart,
> The Archedene off Abbyrdene
> In Brwyss hys Buk has gert be sene,
> Mare wysly tretyde into wryt
> Than I can thynk with all my wyt.
> Tharefore I will now thus lychtly
> Oure at this tyme passe the story. (VIII, 2923 ff.) [13]

The " Robert: efftyrwart " rhyme, which satisfied Wyntoun, never occurs in *The Bruce.* We could not, therefore, introduce Wyntoun's lines, for they bear his stamp, without merely begging the issue. But we might justifiably amend Barbour's, like anyone else's, text, if a better sense were easily secured. Having before us such a line as the following from *The Bruce:*

> This gud knycht that I spek of heir (IX, 496)

and remembering that " er " and " her " (" heire ") rhyme together,[14] we might conjecture that Barbour wrote:

> Thys lord the Brwyss I spek of hayr.[15]

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[13] Wyntoun a little before had written of *The Bruce:*

> Quhat that folwyd efftyrwart,
> How Robert oure kyng recoweryd his land
> That occupyid wyth his fays he fand
> And it restoryd in all fredwyme
> Qwhyt till his *ayris* off all threldwme,
> Quha that lykis that for to wyt,
> To that Buke I tham remyt,
> Quhare Maystere Jhon Barbere, off Abbyrdene
> Archeden, as mony has sene,
> Hys dedis dyted mare wertusly
> Than I can thynk in all study,
> Haldand in all lele suthfastness,
> Set all he wrat noucht his prowes. (VIII, 970)

[14] Cf. VI, 443; XII, 505.

[15] Cf. " As I tald ȝow heir " (VI, 452); " In this tyme that I tell of her " (XIII, 225, 741).

The emendation would, on the whole, be slight, though it would require a double change. But, from the point of view of the context, it would not be very satisfactory, and, what is most important, it would not explain Wyntoun's paraphrase.

There is no need, however, to advance a conjectural emendation if no emendation is necessary, and I venture to suggest that that is the actual situation in the troublesome line before us. It looks as if we have all along simply misread the line, not recognizing in its correct sense there a little word which Barbour uses throughout his book in several senses. But, before discussing that point more definitely, let us look for a moment at the plan of his poem.

III

When King Alexander died, the poet briefly explains, a great dispute arose as to his successor. Some wanted Baliol, some Bruce. Edward I was called in to decide. He offered the crown first to Bruce:

> And to Robert the Brwyss said he,
> "Gyff thow will hald in cheyff off me,
> For euirmar, and thine ofspryng,
> I sall do swa thow sall be king."
> "Schyr," said he, "sa god me save
> The kynryk ȝharn (yearn) I nocht to have,
> Bot gyff it fall off rycht to me:
> And gyff god will that it sa be,
> I sall als frely in all thing
> Hold it, as it afferis to (behooves a) king;
> Or as myn eldirs forouch (before) me
> Held it in freyast reawte (royalty)!" (I, 153 ff.)

Edward, being wroth at this answer, decided in favour of Baliol; but soon after he degraded Baliol and mistreated the Scots. Sir William Douglas was imprisoned and slain, and his lands were given to Clifford. Sir William's son,

Sir James Douglas, then returned from Paris with the intent to "wyn agayn his heritage." The Bishop of St. Andrews took him to the king, stating the youth's desire:

> "Schyr, giff that it be ȝour liking
> He clemys the lordship off Douglas;
> For lord tharoff hys fadir was." (I, 422 ff.)

But Edward maintained that Sir William had died in his prison and was his enemy:

> "Tharfor hys ayr I aucht to be." (I, 431.)

Sir James, being then without power to contradict the king, must await a more favourable time to get back his land.

So far the prelude!

Barbour has openly declared that he had two heroes, King Robert Bruce and Sir James Douglas. "Off thaim," he says, "I thynk this buk to ma" (I, 33). In the prelude he has explained the grievances that led them to war. They both had been deprived of their rights of inheritance. Barbour's book was to tell how each recovered his own. After the prelude, we hear no more of the first Robert Bruce or of Sir William Douglas. The poet deals primarily with their *heirs*.

> The romanys now begynnys her
> Off men that war in gret distress,
> And assayit full gret hardynes,
> Or thai mycht cum till thar entent. (I, 446 ff.)

Almost directly after these words, separated only by a few lines of moralizing, the poet writes: "Thys lord the Brwyss I spak of ayr," etc. He naturally starts with the chief of his heroes, and stresses the point, which he was most anxious for his readers to see from the first, that that chief hero was the "heir" of the Bruce of whom he had already spoken.

I need hardly explain now that in my belief "ayr," the last word of the line under discussion, is not "ere" but "heir." Barbour uses the word "air" ("ar"), frequently in rhyme in his poem, with the various meanings of "ere," "are," "oar," "Ayr." But "ayr" ("air"), it should also be remembered, is the only form in which he writes the word "heir." Whenever it occurs in rhyme, it rhymes, as in the passage under dispute, with "fair" ("fayr").[16] For example:

> He callit his son till him in hy,
> The eldest and apperande *air*,
> A ȝoung bacheler, stark and fair,
> Schir Edward callit of Carnavirnane. (IV, 70 ff.)

> The kyngis douchter that was fair
> And was als his apperand *air*. (XIII, 689 f.)

The line "Thys lord the Brwyss I spak of ayr" then simply means: "The heir of this lord the Bruce of whom I spoke," "the aforesaid Lord Bruce's heir." The line is a bit awkward as it stands, but nothing more. Drop out the parenthetical "I spoke of," and it is as smooth as velvet. If we were writing today of the late Field Marshal of the English army, and discussing how his title might descend by special privilege through his daughter, nothing would be more natural than to write, "This Lord Roberts' heir," and in conversation we might easily say, "This Lord Roberts-I-spoke-of's heir." Of course, we should *write* rather: "The aforesaid Lord Roberts' heir." But Barbour was not so particular. He had a mania for inversions,[17] partly no doubt because he had a very limited

[16] The word "fair" is used by Barbour for "fare" in all senses, "welfare," "go," etc.

[17] Barbour uses constantly such constructions as: "Him that was off England king" (II, 132); "James alsua of Douglas" (II, 132); "Of Glasgow Byshop Robert" (IV, 13); "Of Vallanch schir Amery"

supply of rhymes. Regularly he twists his lines about to get convenient words at the ends.[18]

The following examples will suffice to illustrate his practice of awkward construction:

> And amang othir, off Douglass
> Put in presoun schir Wiȝam was,
> That off Douglas was lord and syr;
> Off him thai makyt a martyr. (I, 281 ff.)

> The lord of Lorne wonnyt thar-by
> That was capitale ennymy
> To the king, for his emys (uncle's) sak
> John Comyn. (III, 1 ff.)

> But the erll of Adell, Davy,
> His sone that was in Kyndromy,
> Com syne. (IX, 288.)

> He wan quytly (wholly) that cuntre
> Till his brothirs pees the kyng. (IX, 651-2.)

> The vardane saw how that it ȝeid,
> That callit was Gyllmyne de Feniss. (X, 455.)

No one, I think, will contend, in the light of such contorted passages (and they might be multiplied),[19] that the line under discussion is exceptionally peculiar. Nor is there any difficulty in the monosyllabic value of Bruce's

(VI, 457, 476, etc.); "Off Crauford als schyr Ranald" (IV, 38); "Off Strathern als the erll" (IX, 340); "Off Bonkill the lord" (IX, 691); "Schir Morisz alsua de Berclay" (XIII, 417).

[18] Here are characteristic inversions: "The quehethir with him dwell wald I" (II, 108); "The tothir part went in the toune is" (III, 240); "And bot eleven within war thai And a woman" (III, 444); "And with glaid hart it thaim gaiff he" (III, 538); "His sone syne eftir kyng he wes" (IV, 335); "Thai that enbuschit was thame saw" (IV, 412); "So did this kyng that I of reid" (IX, 100).

> "Bot he, that had his vachis ay
> On ilk syde, of thar commyng,
> Long or thai com, had vittering." (VI, 44 ff.)

[19] Compare, e. g., in later books, XVI, 526 ff., XVII, 235, XIX, 263 ff.

name. The name is spelt in all sorts of ways in the unique manuscript, written about a hundred years after the poem was composed (*Bruce, Bruss, Brwyss, Brwce, Broiss, Broyss, Bryss*), and metrically, in the genitive, it is either a monosyllable or a dissyllable. An example of the former is: "An on schir Eduard the Brysis rout" (XIII, 311); an example of the latter: "The Bruysss folk full hardely" (II, 366).[20]

We must remember, moreover, that Barbour read and wrote Latin constantly, and that analytic constructions would seem much less odd to him than to us. In Latin the line might read without any confusion: "Hujus domini Bruys praedicti haeres."[21]

There is apparently nothing whatever, then, to interfere with the interpretation here offered. It makes perfect sense; it agrees fully with Wyntoun's reading; it provides just the word that Barbour wanted at the place to establish the assumption by which alone his chief hero's deeds were justified. Perhaps the poet put the word "ayr" at the end of the line expressly for emphasis.

A striking confirmation of the new interpretation may be found in Blind Harry's *Wallace,* which the author wrote with Barbour's poem in mind. The opening of both works, it will be remembered, covers the same ground, both telling of Edward I as arbiter in the contest for the throne, and of his efforts to make himself lord of Scotland.

[20] Compare: "To the byshop of Androwss towne" (II, 81): "and Dowglass baner saw planly" (XVI, 410); (with which cf. "sum of the lord Douglassis men" (XX, 481); cf. in *The Wallace:* "Off Wallace lyff rycht famous of renoun" (V, 541); "Himselff had seyn gret part off Wallace deid" (XL, 1420); "Off Wallace lyff quha has a forthar feill" (XI, 1410).

[21] For the form of the proper name, cf. "domini regis Robert Bruys," in the Exchequer Rolls, IV, p. 457 (quoted Skeat, Preface, p. xxvii); "ad supplicationem David de Bruys" (*Rolls,* I, p. 808).

According to Blind Harry, the English led away Robert Bruce and other "heirs"; he gave Bruce his father's heritage, but not his realm; he planned to keep him in "thraldom":

> Vij scor thai led off the gretast that thai fand
> Off *ayris* with thaim, and Bruce, out of Scotland,
> Eduuard gayf hym his fadir is heretage;
> But he thocht ay till hald hym in thrallage. (I, 133 ff.)

Blind Harry makes his hero resemble Bruce as Barbour describes him,—a man "wys and wicht," who had "gret pitte" when he saw his "kynryk" decay.[22] But when he compares the two patriots, it is openly to the disadvantage of Bruce, save in one important particular, which is strongly emphasized in the following lines:

> Perchance ye say, that Bruce he was none sik.
> He was also gud, quhat deid was to assaill,
> As of his handis, and bauldar in battaill.
> But *Bruce was knawin well ayr off this kynrik,*
> *For he had rycht, we call no man him lik.* (II, 353 ff.)

Again in a later passage, where Wallace is recounting to the English queen the grievances of Scotland "after the date of Alexander's reign," he says:

> Than your fals king, wndyr colour but mar
> Throuch hand he maid till *Bruce that is our ayr*
> Throuch all Scotland with gret power thai raid,
> Wynder that king quhilk he before had maid. (1341 ff.[23])

It is hard for us to understand how much importance was attached to the question as to who was the legitimate heir to the throne of Scotland. Arguments to and fro on the point were kept up for centuries. In 1521, Major, for example, went into the question at great length. "I state my conclusion thus," he says, "Robert Bruce alone *and*

[22] Cf. I, 181 ff., XI, 521.
[23] Cf. also VIII, 139 ff.; 1537 ff.; 1611 f.

his heirs had and have an indisputable claim to the kingdom of Scotland." [24]

Finally, it may be noted that in the first words uttered by Sir James Douglas after the "romance" begins, those to the Bishop of St. Andrews, he emphasizes, like Bruce, his similarly just cause for waging war:

> Schir, ȝe se
> How Inglishmen, throw thar powste (power)
> *Dysherysys me off my land.* (II, 99 ff.)

Each of the two Scots about whom Barbour declares he intended to make his book fought honourably for his heritage against the English, who sought dishonourably to deprive him of it. That is the fundamental theme of *The Bruce.* Barbour was clever enough not to let the king of the Scots forget the lesson of his own experience, but makes him bind himself, just before the final fight of Bannockburn, to "honour," as thus shown:

> And I hecht (promise) heir, in my lawte
> Gif ony deis in this battaill,
> *Hir air,* but (without) ward, releif, or (en)taill,
> On the first day, his land sall weild,
> All be he nevir so ȝhoung of eild (age). (XII, 318 ff.)

Justice to heirs! Barbour enforces strongly the contrast of Bruce to Edward in this, as in other respects. If the English king had been just to the heirs of the elder Bruce and the elder Douglas, Barbour would have had no reason to write. Most effectively he first mentions his chief hero as the "heir" of his grandfather, who, he has insisted, rightly claimed the throne.[25]

[24] Bk. IV, ch. XVII. Constable's translation, p. 213.

[25] At the close of his life, Bruce, still solicitous for his heritage, is represented as sending messengers to the English court to sue for peace,

> For the gud king had in entent,
> Sin god sa fair grace till him sent,

"Much ado about nothing!" So it seems. But Barbour has suffered sadly from no real fault of his own, and we owe him an apology for impugning his honesty without cause. Unwarranted conclusions as to the historical value of his work have been drawn by one generation after another down to the present, on the basis of our constant misreading of a single word. It is we who are responsible for the "glaring error" that we have long sneeringly attributed to the good Archdeacon of Aberdeen. Sneers have a way of coming home to roost.

W. H. SCHOFIELD.

That he had wonnyn all his land,
Throu strinth of armys till his hand,
That he pess in his land wald ma,
And all the landis stabill swa,
That his air aftir hym suld be
In peiss; gif me held thair laute. (XIX, 133 ff.)

Eventually he provides that if his son David died without "air male of his body gotten," Robert Stewart should be king. (XX, 129 ff.)

not. access.

Pamph Barbour, John. The Bruce.
LE Schofield, William Henry.
B.B The chiel historical error in Barbour's Bruce.
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DATE	NAME OF BORROWER